

The President's Daily Brief

~~—Top Secret~~ 19 April 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
19 APRIL 1968

1. Vietnam

Ky is not in favor of replacing Prime Minister Loc with Tran Van Huong. [redacted] Ky described Huong as "too old, stubborn, and opinionated."

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Ky's idea of a prime minister is a man who would leave running the country to Ky and Thieu. The vice president remarked that unity within the government would be threatened should a man of independent thought be named prime minister.

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No large military actions have been reported overnight. Substantial North Vietnamese forces are concentrated near Hue - Phu Bai, but elsewhere major enemy units are moving away from combat areas to regroup and resupply. We continue to note signs of heavy infiltration.

2. Panama

Robles has let it be known that he is not interested in having observers from the OAS watching the elections on 12 May. There are two reasons for his stand. First, the idea of importing observers was broached by Arias; second, the government plans some strong-arming to back up its presidential candidate, Samudio.

Meanwhile, both candidates continue barnstorming through the countryside with Arias drawing big crowds. This display of popularity will spur on the government in its determination to contrive a win for Samudio.

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3. Soviet Union

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4. Israel

Eshkol is under pressure to annex the occupied territories permanently and openly, "peace or no peace." Extremists in Eshkol's own Israel Labor Party took this line at a recent meeting of the party secretariat. Eshkol should be able to keep these hawks on the roost for the time being, but the sentiment they represent is gaining ground in Israel.

5. Nigeria

The civil war moves into its tenth month with no clear prospects for a solution either on the battlefield or at the conference table.

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6. Czechoslovakia

We have now had an opportunity to examine the full text of the "action program" approved by the Czech Central Committee last week. This document is a landmark for a Communist Party, lifting the party's deadening hand from the process of government.

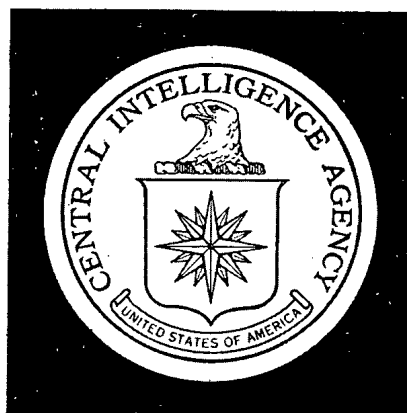
The program emphasizes a careful approach to change, but it is a charter pledging the party to work with the people rather than rule them autocratically. It guarantees personal rights, including freedom of assembly, speech, and religion. It recommends that the National Assembly stop being a rubber stamp congress and "really decide on laws and important political questions."

The program shows many compromises between the conservatives and progressives and to that extent reflects Dubcek's own middle-of-the-road course.

The Soviets are far from enthusiastic about the Czech program and the change it implies. The Moscow press, for instance, has published only the least offensive portions of the program, pointedly omitting the more contentious features. Moscow, nevertheless, is probably reconciled to important changes in Czechoslovakia--and Dubcek presumably knows the limits of Moscow's toleration.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

More Propaganda: As Hanoi propaganda continues to bear down on the issue of the US accepting either Warsaw or Phnom Penh, the Communists are also beginning to play the theme that the site for initial talks does not have to be used for the subsequent substantive talks.

The message is apparently being pushed by the North Vietnamese through the Poles and the French. On 17 February, a Polish deputy foreign minister called in the ambassadors of several Free World countries to urge concerted pressure on the US to accept Warsaw as a site for preliminary talks.

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Soviets Reinforcing Hanoi's Position: Speaking in Rawalpindi on 17 April, Soviet Premier Kosygin tried to interject a note of urgency into the demand that the US immediately enter into talks with Hanoi. Kosygin, on a state visit to Pakistan, is reported by Tass to have stated that "a highly crucial moment" has now come for the US to act. The Soviet premier also reiterated that the complete cessation of bombing and all acts of war against North Vietnam is "the first necessary step" toward a political settlement and the "minimum demand" to be met.

The tenor of Kosygin's comments is in line with North Vietnam's own propaganda. Soviet media since 3 April have done their best to put pressure on the US to move to the negotiating table as rapidly as possible. At the same time, the Soviets continue to state their fullest possible support for all of Hanoi's moves.

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Notes from Hanoi: [REDACTED]

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sions of the situation in Hanoi:

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--The feeling in the diplomatic corps is that Hanoi's rapid response to President Johnson's 31 March offer was because North Vietnamese leaders had been about to spring their own peace initiative.

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--[] had heard nothing--not even rumors--that the Chinese had approached North Vietnam on the issue of contacts with the US.

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--Hanoi's complaints about continued US bombing at and below the 20th parallel were "routine" and not taken particularly seriously by Hanoi under present circumstances.

--Anti-US propaganda has continued at about the same volume as before, but is now "back page" news; prominence is now given to world press opinion on the desirability of talks.

--[] Hanoi portrayed the US offer of 31 March as a "political victory" for the North Vietnamese, rather than the result of a military victory.

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--Only one bombing alert has been heard in Hanoi since 3 April. Children, especially those of preschool age, are now more in evidence in Hanoi.

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Soviet Seaborne Shipments to North Vietnam; Plans for 1968: The Soviet Union has announced plans to increase seaborne shipments to North Vietnam by 20 percent in 1968. The implied growth in North Vietnamese imports from the Soviet Union above the 1967 level is about 125,000 tons--less than the increases of 137,000 in 1966 and 141,000 in 1967. About 30 additional ship arrivals would be needed to carry the increase in tonnage planned for 1968.

In the first quarter of 1968, imports from the Soviet Union ran 30 percent higher than the monthly average in 1967. All of this increase consisted of petroleum and foodstuffs; these commodities probably account for most of the planned growth for the year.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi Quotes Critics: Senators Fulbright and McCarthy get prominent mention in today's propaganda. This morning Hanoi broadcast in English a Nhan Dan article about the US lack of good will in arranging a place to talk. The point was buttressed by quotes from the two senators. Senator Fulbright is quoted saying, "I see nothing at all wrong in going to Phnom Penh." Senator McCarthy is reported criticizing the President and calling for a new Secretary of State.

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